

The Hoofs of Pegasus

by

M. Letitia Stockett

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Geo Branton June

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THE HOOFS OF PEGASUS



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BY

M. LETITIA STOCKETT

1923


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THE HOOFS OF PEGASUS

PEGASUS

ONCE in a saffron twilight, rich with the
 sound of bells,
In a dim meadow straying, high on the lonely fells,
I saw Pegasus, winged Pegasus, cropping the
 asphodels.

His neck was clothed with thunder, his feet with
 strength were shod;
Terrible in his beauty, he grazed on the starry
 sod,
A white, untameable beauty, a stallion fit for a
 god.

Meekly he ranged unfettered; his wings were
 wet with dew,
And where they trailed in the blossomy grass, a
 misty rainbow grew,
Those strong, exultant pinions that trample the
 windy blue.

Then suddenly he raised his head. I felt the
 pulsing beat
Of his valiant hoofs. He sprang on the track of
 the stars, unleashed and fleet.
I was alone; but deep in the grass was the print
 of his deathless feet.

IN OCTOBER

IN a shower of ruddy gold
From a thinning tree
Jove comes down.
Naked, brown,
The earth lies Danae.

Still she lies with hushed breath;
Through each dreaming clod
Runs the fire
Of desire,
Passion of a god.

Danae lies in her dark tower.
On a March hillside
Springs the wheat—
There the feet
Of young Perseus stride.

SLEEP

LAST night I slid into the sea of sleep,
Translucent, cool and deep.
I left my dusty self upon the sand
Like an old garment. Naked, free,
I felt the waves close over me;
The curious, eager water pressed
Against the white curve of my breast.
Then deep, deep
Through the green depths I sank
Into the sea of sleep.

This morning I rose out of the dark tide,
I rose through darkness, and there was no light,
No radiance to illumine
The dusk; only the pallid gloom
Of sleep. First green, then blue,
Then the thin water parted, and the sun shone
through.
There lay my body; strangely it was I.

What did I bring back from the soundless deep
From that grey, ancient sea of sleep:—

The glint of sunken gold, the plaintive knell
Of some drowned bell,
Remembrance vague and dim
Of ghostly argosies,
The misty shores of far Hesperides,
The wraith of mermaids beckoning white and
slim,
The faint sea-music of a curvéd shell.

FREE

I am a beggar maiden,
I sleep beneath a thorn,
At night my tree is thick with stars,
I see the slender horn
Of the young moon,
I see the clean
Essential light of morn.

The King Cophetua and his Queen
Ride by disdainfully;
He glitters like a dragonfly,
A scornful mouth has she—
A curled red leaf—
Yet she was once
A beggar maid like me.

The spearmen ride before them.
My path no mortal knows;
A ruby smoulders on her brow,
My thicket yields a rose.
Dance, dusty feet!
I'm glad I'm not
The maid Cophetua chose.

OUR LADY OF UNDERSTANDING

OUR Lady understands
Though prayerful are her folded hands;
Her face is pale
Within the azure shadow of her veil.
Here in this shrine she seems remote, apart,
For the dim centuries have quenched her fire,
The slow years molded her to their desire.
Ah, still she knows
The ecstasy that glows
In my wild heart!
Once, not submissive, meek
With pensive brow and duteous cheek,
There came a cry exultant, strong;
"My soul doth magnify the Lord!"
Clear as a ringing sword
I hear her song.
In high humility
She knew herself to be
The Chosen of God, the Gate of the Divine.
I kneel before her shrine,
I gaze upon her tranquil face,
Hail Mary, full of grace!
I, too, know Love,
And I am humble, proud, and wise.
Our Lady understands
All joy, all woe;
The Son of God she laid to rest
Upon her breast,
She knew the wounded Hands,
And there is nothing else to know.

AT EVENTIDE

I shall light the candle,
You will play for me
In the winter twilight
A quiet melody.

Let there be no sorrow
In your song, or tears,
Let all grief be ended,
All the iron years.

Set our love to music,
Like a rose in June,
All the summer's beauty
In one slender tune.

SACRAMENT

AS up and down the fields I went,
The fields of trembling wheat,
Under the high blue heavens of June
In summer's popped heat,
I worked at homely common tasks
Sharp stubble 'neath my feet.
But I was not alone; I knew
A comradeship most sweet,

For as I gathered up the sheaves
And bound the heavy grain,
One whispered: "Yea, the world needs Food;
Hungry it goes, and fain
Am I to be its Bread, and give
My Body for its pain.
For this I lay in the dark earth
Through sun and singing rain."

Into the vineyard I was sent,
There One was keeping tryst.
I cut the grapes—how beautiful
Their bloomy amethyst!
He said "This is my Blood, the Wine
Poured for the world, ye wist.
In wheat and grape ye work with me
To make my Eucharist."

TRUTH IN A WELL

I PEERED into a well, and saw
The blue, blue eye of God
Look into mine far from the sun,
Far from the friendly sod.

And suddenly I was afraid—
The old wives' tales are true—
God is the truth hid in a well,
How dread His gaze, how blue!

SILENCE

WE are still;
There are no words.
Across the sky
A wedge of birds
Flies northward. Brown and thinned,
A brittle leaf rasps in the wind.
The sun creeps on from tree to tree.

We are still.
Were a word spoken,
Like a troubled pool
Is silence broken.
Better far be dumb.
There are depths no stone could plumb;
Circles widen endlessly.

JEWELS

EMERALD, ruby, amethyst,
Sardius, beryl, topaz, jade;
All the ramparts round high Heaven
Of these shining stones are made.

But to beggars who must trudge
Parched roads with weary feet,
God has flung His jewels down
In the very city street.

In this meager dusty square
Lindens bud in emerald mist
Lilacs burdened with perfume
Bloom in heavenly amethyst.

Here is water crystal clear,
Virgin jade is not more green.
At the pool's edge Judas trees
Starred with ruby blossoms lean.

Emerald, topaz, amethyst,
Glittering unearthly bright,
Scattered by the hand of God,
Beryl, sardius, chrysolite.

THE POOL

THERE is a pool
 Silent, dark and still,
It holds the patterns of the trees
The polished lacquered trceries
Until a whimpering breeze
Breaks the design at will.

And through those waters dart
Eyeless fish and blind,
Some silver coloured as a star
Or crimson as a bloody scar,
Sinister their beauties are
Like mad thoughts in the mind.

Stranger than scaly thing
Or imaged leaf,
I see myself a shadow there,
The fish are gliding through my hair
My dull eyes have a fixed stare
Drowned in the pool of grief.

LARKSPUR

OUT in the garden as you played,
A breeze moved to and fro
Across my bed of larkspur
In grave adagio.

The wind with touch most delicate,
Went up and down the scale—
Wine-dark, frail amethyst, and blue,
Blue as Our Lady's veil.

You played softly to yourself,
Your brown hands on the keys;
And God with larkspur,
You with sound, were making harmonies.

SOUNDS

I SHUT my eyes and all around
The room is murmurous with sound,
Small lovely sounds without, within,
Faint as a muted violin.

On the low roof the quiet rain
Falls hushingly in wistful strain,
It makes soft music in the leaves,
And drips staccato from the eaves.

A grey moth flutters her frail wings
Against the glass; the kettle sings.
Someone is reading low and clear
Of Roncesvalles and Oliver.

And with this voice all sounds are blent
In pensive slow accompaniment,
A melody made up of rain,
Young leaves, a grey moth on the pane.

TO SALARI'S MADONNA

O LITTLE Son who draweth life from me,
How deep a mystery.
The very source of life thou art,
And yet thou liest on my heart.

O little Son, joy pierceth me.
Is thus fulfilled the old man's prophecy?
Sweet, sweet thy lips! Nay, little Son,
"A sword, a sword", said Simeon.

THE BATHERS

ALL in the misty weather,
When clouds were hanging low,
I trod a leafy woodland path
Long, long ago.

The cold green light of morning
Shivered among the trees,
The little leaves were tremulous,
Stirred by an eery breeze.

And then to me 'was given
A sight that one might dream,
Three maidens white and glistening,
Bathing in a stream.

One floated idly drifting,
One shook her wet locks free,
One stood as slender as a boy,
As white as ivory;

Naked, unshamed, untrammelled;
Ah, never did they know,
I saw three maidens bathing
Long, long ago.

AT THE SYMPHONY

THE lights grow dim. There comes a hush.
Then swiftly in a mighty rush
As of great waters, over me
Break the slow surges of the symphony.

With a vast sweep majestic
Like emerald waves that toppling fall
In foam, far off and faint begins
The swelling beauty of the violins.

Silence. On some far beach I've heard
The high sweet keening of a bird.
Now all the instruments are mute
But the rich music of a lonely flute.

Once more the wave is poised to break,
Once more the wind-swept water shake
My soul; and in this harmony
I know the splendour of the trampling sea.

WEDDING SONG

THIS is her room. The sunlight lies
In squares upon the floor.
Here are her books, the ivory god
She brought from Singapore.

Here she stood in shining white
Her hands were kind and cool,
Her eyes were very still that day,
Serene and beautiful.

Out in the sun the garden glowed
And I remember this:
The fragrance of the grapes, a shower
Of starry clematis.

FEBRUARY

ALL the rhythms of life are slow
All the streams are choked with snow,
Evening skies are pale,
The very stars are still,
On the long slope of the hill
Woodsmoke weaves a pattern frail.

No cloak, no pretense here;
The earth is clean as a naked spear,
Beauty is stripped bare;
But she will stoop as winter lingers
To pluck arbutus with expectant fingers,
And weave the cold sweet blossoms in her hair.

TO THE FOUR ARCHANGELS

IF Michael lent his splintering lance
And his blue eager blade,
Though you with scaly dragons fight
You would not be afraid.

If Gabriel should stoop to you,
A rainbow in his wings,
What luminous secrets you would know,
What wise and simple things!

If Raphael with you should strive
Until the stars grew dim,
Angelic vigour would be yours,
The strength of Seraphim.

If on your sight great Uriel burned,
Whose feet with fire are shod,
He'd touch your earthly song of praise
Into a flame for God.

Michael, Gabriel, Raphael,
Holy Uriel, guard you well.

A PRISONER

A PRISONER am I.
In fivefold gyves and strong
I shall be captive, bound,
My whole life long.
But fettered, I shall make my bonds
Into a shining song.

For if it were not for the chains I bear
I should be unaware
Of the frail splendour of a peacock pacing slow,
Rich, opalescent dyes,
Blue, green, bronze-burnished, lustrous argent
eyes—

A fanfarade
Of lapis, azure, emerald and jade—
A glory of spread plumes where shattered rain-
bows played.

And never should I know
The sound of running water soft and low,
The hushed grey music of a summer rain,
A plain song cadence, beautiful and strange,
Old wistful chants scarred with lost Eden's pain.

Nor should I mark the rough austerity
Of surf, the rude caress of waves that buffet me.
Or find delight
In the cool touch of smoothéd ivory.

And always I should lack
The scent of burning leaves, the poignant smack
Of box; or heliotrope in the hot sun;
Primroses opening their pale stars one by one.

Then, too, I should forego the savour of fresh
bread.

Clear-dripping honey thick with the perfume
Of the red clover bloom.

And never should I cool my parchéd mouth
With luscious apricots, warm, tinctured of the
South. '

God, when my body must

Return to dust,

O let me be

Not utterly set free

From these my friendly bonds!

O let me use them there, as here, for Thee

With deeper rapture, keener ecstasy.

AFTERWARD

NOW I remember very plain:
A sumac leaf was red,
The bloom of grape was on the hills,
The river was a twisted thread.

That day I marked not leaf nor hill,
Nor rivers to the sea—
I was my lover's garden closed,
I was his tower of ivory.

THE ASCENT OF ISHTAR

AT the first gate they gave the veil to Ishtar:
On earth a pear tree trembles into bloom,
The poplar weaves a web of changeful green and
silver,
Lord Tammuz comes back from his dusty tomb.

At the second gate they sped her on the journey,
They gave her bracelets for her hands and slender
feet:

Through the reeds the wind goes piping, piping,
The flutes of Tammuz are piping shrill and sweet.

And the jewelled circlet they bound about her
waist.

Can a ruby make the Daughter of the Moon
more fair?

Like bright spears in battle are the young men,
And the maidens braid the pomegranate blossoms
in their hair.

About the breasts of Ishtar they bound the
sumptuous ornaments.

The necklace they surrendered, and caused her
to depart.

And the cedar knows the Lady's strength and
her dominions,

For the Dweller in the Morning Star makes
strong the cedar's heart.

At the sixth gate they brought to Lady Ishtar
The ear-rings, lovely as the silver-threaded rain;
On the housetops there is the pleasant sound of
 showers,
And on the slopes the green swords of grain.

At the seventh gate they crowned the Queen of
 Heaven,
She has brought back Tammuz from the house
 of death.
The winter is past, the rain is gone and over,
And sweet is the vineyard in the south wind's
 breath.

DISCOVERY

A BIRD to me was just a bird,
A feathered thing one often heard
Piping in the early dawn
In the lilacs on the lawn.
But from you I learned to see
All the beauty there can be
In the birds—the deep wood note
Throbbing in the veery's throat,
A cardinal adventuring by
As if a poppy tried to fly.
God speaks indeed from bush and tree
Since you discovered birds for me.

POMEGRANATES

IN city streets the blue dusk falls.
The lights prick out. Folks hurry by.
Buses are thronged. Sleek motors flash.
"Extra—ship sunk!" the newsboys cry.

Before a little shop I pause
Where Pietro sells, strange, precious fruit,
Great globes of scarlet, heaps of gold
Barbaric as a pirate's loot.

I see pomegranates glowing there,
And I forget the strident night,
I hear the song of Solomon—
"Return, return, O Shulamite.

Thy lips are like a scarlet thread,
O prince's daughter, thou art fair;
Thy garments are perfumed with myrrh,
With aloes drips thy braided hair."

Dim fragrant gardens close me in,
The city as a dream has gone,
And from the South I feel the winds
Blow soft from cedared Lebanon.

TO BOTTICELLI'S VENUS

IN the early dawning before the sun had risen
The wind piped mournfully along the lonely
sand,
The sea lay desolate, sunless, desolate,
There was no light upon the deep or light upon
the land.

Before the sun had risen in the cold green twilight
Came a Lady from the foam, a Lady wistful
eyed,
The crinkled waves beneath her feet ran eagerly
before her,
She drifted in from alien seas at the turn of the
tide.

Light came into the world with her. I knelt
before her beauty,
Her pure and awful nakedness unaware of shame,
Her slender fingers hiding the apple of her bosom,
Her red gold hair unfilleted blown like a windy
flame.

Softly blew the winds about her, softly fell the
blossoms,
But in her face was sorrow for the long years to be:
The kiss beneath the olives, the anguish of betrayal,
Her grief was for the wounds of Love, Our Lady
of the Sea.

HAGAR

THE desert trembles in the heat
The water pools are bitter.
Boy, we follow the camel track;
Sarah rides in a scarlet litter.

Here is the water, Ishmael,
The bread your father gave.
Sarah crumbles a wheaten cake,
Her cup is filled by an eager slave.

Tonight our tent is hung with stars.
In comfort Sarah rests.
Abram dreams of the bondwoman,
Of Hagar's brown breasts.

Lord Osiris hear me!
Isis, Heavenly One!
All men's hands are against me,
But mine was the first-born son.

THE PIPER

YOU laid your slender fingers,
Your fingers long and brown,
Upon the pipes, and lured me
Far from the stolid town.

You piped me to the greenwood,
And there, when grace was said,
We brake and ate together
The fairy's secret bread.

Oh then my ears were opened
And magically I heard
The small leaves talk together,
The gossip of a bird.

Bewitched? There is no telling:
But always, till I'm dead,
I'll hear your silver piping
And eat your fairy bread.

THE JUDAS TREE

WINTER to my tree has lent
Beauty clean and innocent,
Here no purple flowers blow,
But crystal blossoms of the snow,
Every crooked bough is set
With starry petals delicate.

Judas flung the silver down,
And hanged himself beyond the town:
Spring returns. The traitor blood
Quickens in each scarlet bud.
Frost and snow remember not—
Mercy on Iscariot.

WAITING

I WILL be silent,
But in the hush
My heart will sing
Like a hermit thrush.

I will be silent
I'll say no word,
My love shall burn
Like a flame unstirred.

I' will be silent,
My joy I'll hide,
And wait as the sand
For the turn of tide.

THE LAST FURROW

(ON EDWARD CALVERT'S WOODCUT)

AND suddenly my field was Heaven:
I saw a shepherd stand
On the edge of my ploughed land,
And every dusty furrow shone with gold.
And every leaf and blade of grass
Whose common loveliness I had let pass
Now did unfold
New beauties to my sight.
God was that Shepherd garmented in light.

And there was singing:
In a beechen wood
Three maidens stood
And with their music praised God
In a sweet and pleasant hymn.
They danced, three maidens white and slim
A measure, delicately trod.
He loves no sad austerities,
God is well praised by nymphs beneath the
trees.

My field was Heaven.

An angel sped

With a bright bolt, and pierced the Serpent's
head,

Satan is under heel. Good beasts, enthralled,

Velvet mole, and leathern wing,

Worm with fiery sting,

And every noisome slug that crawled

Are all set free. God is not in some alien place.

In my ploughed' field I saw the brightness of
his face.

HORSE CHESTNUTS

IN April my horse chestnuts
Were beautiful to see!
Tapers set on every bough
Like candles on a tree.
But now in late October
With frosty nights and cold
There is more poignant beauty
In their dim tarnished gold.

THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

THEN Jesus said, "I thirst", And there was
one

Who filled a sponge, and put it to His mouth—
An unknown Roman soldier—his the joy
In the three hours to quench that sacred drouth.

They had been dicing, and the seamless coat
Had fallen to him. Now the thick darkness came
Over the land. He watched the Crucified
Wondering, in doubt, this soldier without name.

"Bacchus! The Jew knew how to die. The nails
Were blunt. He neither railed nor cursed.
Even the sturdy thief had called him 'Lord' ".
At the ninth hour there came the cry, "I thirst".

The Roman held the vinegar to his lips,
And looked with pity on His dying Face.
O Unknown Soldier, pray for me to give
My love's poor wine, and give it with such grace.

THE FALLOW FIELDS

LET the fields lie fallow
Bare and brown.
Let the great winds stride over them
And the snow come down.

Let them lie open to the sun
To the patient rain,
And the dews whiten them
E'er they yield again.

Plough in the sturdy weed,
The common flower,
Let their wild vigor yield
A lusty dower.

Then after sun and snow
After dew and sleet
From the earth will spring the green
Flame of the wheat.

THE PATTERAN

I 'M married to a proper wife,
My home is clean and neat,
But I hear the gypsies calling me,
I love the dancing feet.

I long to up and follow them
Over the rolling moor;
I sicken of my own hearth-fire,
The lilacs by the door.

I long to see the sweep of stars
Wheel nightly overhead;
I want the four strong winds to be
The four posts of my bed.

I long to wake at dawn
When all the world is grey and cool,
And slip into the lonely depth
Of a mountain pool.

Three meals my wife sets for me—
Enough for any man.
But on her freshly sanded floor
I see the patteran.

TO A MUSICIAN

I THOUGHT that only God could make the
rain,

But when you laid your hands upon the keys
The room was full of gentle harmonies—
An eager shower pattering on the pane,
The hushed and wistful tread
Of rain at night that marches overhead,
The kind, grey rain that stills the windy trees.

I thought that only God could make a star,
But I have heard your fingers build the sky,
Have watched the yellow dusk of autumn die
And night creep up the east immense and far,
Then glittering and bright,
I've seen the Hunter girt with silver light,
Orion with his shining hounds sweep by.

I thought that only God could make the sea,
But in your music the unbounded deep
Is gathered up as in a treasure heap—
Calm spaces, rocks where singing tides run free,
The cloudy-emerald foam
Ships on the world's dim verge, far, far from home,
And pools unrippled where the hushed winds
sleep.

TEMPO

M^Y body could play delicate tunes,
Music exquisite and thin,
But I must keep it in its case
Like a violin.

A Scherzo prances in my blood,
Mercurial and quick;
I pirouette—the box snaps tight
With a malicious click.

A Saraband is not for me,
It makes the varnish crack.
I must play a grave, grave tune
Slow and elegiac!

TO SCRIABINE: L'EXTASE

NOT with the drums, the throbbing scarlet
drums,
Not with the voice of a silver flute,
Not with the brazen clangour of cymbals,
Nor the trumpets slitting the silence;
Not with the maelstrom of sound
Monstrous, prodigious,
Comes ecstasy.
But with stillness
As when a flame burns unflickering
In far, empty places;
With the quiet of a leaf falling in the forest;
With the hush of the elevation of the Host.

ADAM ASLEEP

FAR away I hear the voices of four rivers
 flowing,
Wings in the thicket, and the four winds blowing.
Adam sleeps in Eden. In this still place
I lie within his circling arm and look upon his
 face.

God walks in the garden when the day is cool,
But the face of Adam is far more beautiful;
He is like the splendour of the sun at noon,
And the slope of his body like the white young
 moon.

Of what is he dreaming as he lies at rest?
Of God in the Garden? Or Lilith's breast?
Adam sleeps in Eden, but down in the brake
I watch the cool glitter of a painted snake.

AN OLD HOUSE

I LOVE an old house,
It is like an aged face,
The worn lines,
The strange, defeated grace.

Sorrow looks through these windows
Through the crooked glass.
And the sill is hollow
Where Death's feet pass.

But there is yet a beauty,
A triumph, a haughty thrust;
The meek defiance of ancient loveliness
Before the dust is dust.

MOONRISE

LIKE a white lotus flower the moon unfolds
Her luminous petals and the stars grow
pale.

Vague mists withdraw, grey shadows o'er the
water

Shadows of twilight tremulous and frail.

The flutes of dusk are still; new worlds unveil;
God for such moments made the nightingale.

And yet, O Philomel, thou couldst not chant
From the cool shadow of a cedar tree,
So high a lay as this I hear in rapture,
The song his utter silence sings to me.
Of the brown earth is thy winged melody.
But God is in this wordless ecstasy.

CAGED

I HAVE a caged bird,
He beats the bars;
Wild and bright his eyes,
On his breast, scars.

An oriole whistles;
My bird has not a note,
Though I can see the song
Trembling in his throat.

Other birds fly south
To the green pampas floor,
But in the blue air
Mine spreads his wings no more.

I have a caged bird,
He neither flies nor sings,
But when the house is still
I hear the beat of wings.





Sam
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